Book & New Media Reviews

Careers in Anesthesiology: Autobiographical Memoirs, volume VIII

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This eighth volume in the Wood Library Museum's series of Autobiographical Memoirs showcases the lives and careers of four giants in the establishment of research as a part of our specialty: A.A. Spence, J.F. Biebuyck, R.J. Kitz and J.W. Severinghaus. These may not be familiar names to all anesthesiologists, but their research and careers were pivotal to the advancement of knowledge in physiology and pharmacology as well as the transition and recognition of anesthesia as a profession.

These autobiographies are personal vignettes including unique aspects of the author's professional and personal lives. The writings are reflective, insightful and humorous at times. Examples include Dr. Spence's teaching of the "kiss of life" to Engelbert Humperdink; Dr. Biebuyck's serendipitous discovery of the animal model of malignant hyperthermia; Dr. Kitz's portrayal of himself as the "kid from Osh Kosh" who became an anesthesiologist "under duress" and Dr. Severinghaus's description of self-experimentation common to research at the time, which included undergoing lumbar and jugular bulb punctures at high altitude, along with the ensuing side effects. There is a common thread amongst these original thinkers, of persistence in the belief of their ideas, pursuit of solutions to problems, and the importance of mentorship and the establishment of anesthesia as an autonomous specialty. Although there are various sections, as there are colleagues that the individual reader will relate to more than others, overall this volume is enjoyable reading.

These memoirs will not enable one to administer a better anesthetic, although there are excellent explanations of physiology and pharmacology encompassed within the text. Reading these memoirs will, however, enable one to better appreciate the challenges that our profession has overcome, and those we continue to face during this millennium as we continue to build upon the work of these remarkable individuals who precede us.